PORTRAIT OF AN AMERICAN CITY
PAUL FRANCUCH

MAY 15, 1978
SERIES 5 NO. 4

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE -- BIRTHPLACE OF THE BLUES
(INSERTS IN THE TAPE LIBRARY)

TAPE: CUT ONE -- MUSIC: "MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE," BY CHUCK BERRY. IN FULL FOR :25, THEN FADE UNDER NARRATOR AND HOLD. CUT RUNS :55. (EDITOR'S NOTE -- AN UNEDITED VERSION OF THE SONG IS AVAILABLE AS CUT 19).

NARR: MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE -- A COMMERCIAL HUB FOR AMERICA'S MID-SOUTH, SITTING ATOP A BLUFF OVERLOOKING THE MUDDY WATERS OF THE MIGHTY MISSISSIPPI RIVER -- WATERS WHICH BROUGHT LIFE TO MEMPHIS. LIKE ITS EGYPTIAN NAMESAKE, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE SITS AT THE HEAD OF A FERTILE RIVER DELTA. THE LAND WHICH FANS SOUTHWARD FROM MEMPHIS IS PERHAPS THE MOST FERTILE ON EARTH. IT'S THE LAND OF COTTON -- "KING COTTON," AS THE LOCAL PEOPLE CALL IT. THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA HAS GROWN BLIZZARDS OF COTTON, YEAR AFTER YEAR, FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY...AND THE FERTILE LANDS HAVE YET TO BE STARVED OF NUTRIENTS.

BEFORE AMERICA'S CIVIL WAR IN THE 1860S, THE COTTON WAS PICKED BY BLACK SLAVES. AFTER THE WAR, WHEN SLAVERY WAS ABOLISHED, BLACK PEOPLE CONTINUED TO TEND THE LAND...ONLY NOW THEY WERE FREE TO TRAVEL. ON WEEKENDS, WHEN THE PACE OF WORK SLACKENED SOMEWHAT, BLACK FARMERS OF THE DELTA HEADED NORTH TO MEMPHIS TO SHOP, SOCIALIZE AND HAVE A GOOD TIME. THAT INCLUDED MUSIC -- A KIND OF MUSIC UNIQUELY THEIRS WHICH PERSONALLY RECOUNTED TALES OF HARD TIMES -- MUSIC CALLED THE "BLUES." IN MEMPHIS, THE BLUES BECAME AN ARTFORM.

TAPE: CUT TWO -- MUSIC: BLUES PERFORMED BY W.C. HANDY. IN FULL FOR :20, THEN FADE AND HOLD UNDER ANNOUNCER FOR:

ANNCR: THE VOICE OF AMERICA PRESENTS A PORTRAIT OF AN AMERICA CITY -- MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE: THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE "BLUES." YOUR NARRATOR IS _____.

TAPE: BRING MUSIC UP, IN FULL, TO REESTABLISH, THEN FADE UNDER NARRATOR AND LOSE WHEN DESIRED. CUT RUNS :55.

NARR: WE BEGIN OUR STORY OF MEMPHIS JUST A FEW MINUTES' WALK FROM THE CITY'S DOWNTOWN. THE PLACE IS BEALE STREET -- AND IF YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE BLUES, YOU PROBABLY KNOW THE STORY WE'RE ABOUT TO TELL. BEALE STREET WAS THE MECCA OF ACTIVITY FOR BLACK PEOPLE IN MEMPHIS DURING THE EARLY 1900S.

OPT

THEY CAME FROM AROUND THE CITY AND THROUGHOUT THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA TO SHOP AND BE ENTERTAINED ALONG THIS RELATIVELY SHORT STRETCH OF REAL ESTATE. ON WEEKENDS, BEALE STREET NEVER WENT TO SLEEP. SALOONS AND CLUBS PULSATED WITH LIFE AROUND THE CLOCK. STREET MUSICIANS SANG FOR A PITTANCE. THEY SANG OF THE HARD TIMES WHICH PLAGUED THEM BETWEEN THE WEEKENDS. MANY CALLED THESE SHORT SONGS THE "REALS"-- REFLECTIONS ON REAL LIFE. OTHERS CALLED IT THE "BLUES." IT WAS MELANCHOLY SET TO MUSIC.

NO OTHER SPOT IN ANY OTHER CITY IN AMERICA, OR IN THE WORLD, OFFERED SUCH A CONCENTRATION OF TALENTED BLUES MUSICIANS AS THE CLUBS AND SIDEWALKS OF BEALE STREET IN MEMPHIS. EVENTUALLY, MANY OF THESE MUSICIANS MIGRATED NORTHWARD FROM MEMPHIS WHERE SOCIAL CONDITIONS FOR BLACKS WERE BETTER, AND THE BLUES AUDIENCES WERE BIGGER ... AND GROWING.

OPT

BUT THEIR ROOTS WERE PLANTED IN BEALE STREET. MEMPHIS BLUES HISTORIAN HARRY GODWIN KNEW MANY OF THESE MUSICIANS WHO PERFORMED ON BEALE STREET:

TAPE: CUT THREE -- GODWIN

OPT

"THERE ARE SO MANY PEOPLE WHO GREW UP IN THIS PART OF THE COUNTRY AND GAVE THEIR LITTLE BIT TO THE TYPE OF MUSIC HERE, AND THEN FOUND THAT THEY WERE MORE APPRECIATED FURTHER ON THAT THIS GREAT EXODUS CONTINUED TO CHICAGO, AND LATER TO NEW YORK. BUT THESE BLUES PEOPLE, PROBABLY BECAUSE OF THE FACT THAT BEALE STREET BECAME THE HUB OF NEGRO DAY AND NIGHTLIFE, AND WE WERE SO CLOSE TO THE MANY CENTERS, THE MANY LITTLE TOWNS DOWN IN THE DELTA, MEMPHIS DID BECOME A DRAWING CARD FOR THE PEOPLE WHO DEVELOPED THIS KIND OF MUSIC."

NARR: BLUES LYRICS WERE OFTEN EPHEMERAL, CREATED EXTEMPORANEOUSLY, SET TO MUSIC, THEN OFTEN FORGOTTEN. BUT A MAN NAMED WILLIAM CHRISTOPHER HANDY -- OR W.C. HANDY, AS HE WAS COMMONLY KNOWN -- DECIDED TO TAKE NOTE OF THESE LYRICS AND KEEP THEM ON FILE. HANDY WAS A BEALE STREET MUSICIAN, AND A HISTORIAN OF SORTS, WHO WOVE HIS MANY COLLECTED LYRICS INTO CLASSIC COMPOSITIONS. HE FIRST GAINED NOTORIETY FROM A TUNE HE COMPOSED IN 1909 FOR A MEMPHIS POLITICIAN NAMED EDWARD CRUMP, WHO WAS RUNNING FOR MAYOR. CRUMP WAS DETERMINED TO REFORM MEMPHIS POLITICS, AND HE NEEDED A CATCHY NEW SONG TO ADVERTISE HIS PLATFORM. IN THIS HISTORICAL RECORDING, THE LATE PROFESSOR HANDY SINGS PART OF THAT TUNE WHICH HE CALLED, SIMPLY, "MISTER CRUMP," AND HE RECALLS

OPT

THE REACTION IT GOT AFTER ITS FIRST PERFORMANCE:

TAPE: CUT FOUR -- W.C. HANDY SINGING "MR. CRUMP" (RUNS :45), FOLLOWED BY ACTUALITY:

OPT

"WE PLAYED THAT ON THE CORNER OF MAIN AND MADISON, AND IT STOPPED THE TRAFFIC. STENOGRAPHERS DANCED WITH THEIR BOSSES. THEY RAN UP TO THE BAND TO KNOW WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THAT, AND WE SAID 'MR. CRUMP.' WE HAD TO PLAY IT OVER AND OVER AND OVER. AND MISTER CRUMP GOT ELECTED, AND MEMPHIS GREW SO THAT IF A BAND COULDN'T PLAY 'MR. CRUMP,' THEY COULDN'T GET A JOB. INSTEAD OF FINDING OURSELVES LOAFING MOST OF THE TIME, I PUT 67 MUSICIANS TO WORK PLAYING 'MR. CRUMP.' AND THEN LATER, I PUBLISHED THIS NUMBER BUT I COULDN'T USE MR. CRUMP'S NAME, AS HE D BECOME THE 'BOSS' (A LEADING POWER) OF TENNESSEE POLITICS. SO I CHANGED THE NAME FROM 'MR. CRUMP' TO 'THE MEMPHIS BLUES," WHICH IS THE FIRST BLUES PUBLISHED. AND THE 'MEMPHIS BLUES' CARRIED THE FIRST JAZZ BREAK FOR THE TENOR SAXAPHONE."

NARR: "MEMPHIS BLUES" -- THE OUTGROWTH OF HANDY'S CAMPAIGN SONG "MR. CRUMP," WAS WRITTEN AND PUBLISHED IN 1912. IT WAS THE FIRST BLUES COMPOSITION EVER TO BE COPYRIGHTED.

TAPE: CUT FIVE -- MUSIC: "THREE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING," BY B.B. KING AND BOBBY "BLUE" BLAND. ESTABLISH BRIEFLY, THEN FADE UNDER NARRATOR AND USE AS A MUSIC BED. CUT RUNS 3:00

NARR: WHILE THE BLUES, AS AN ARTFORM, WAS MATURING DOWN ON BEALE STREET, SKYSCRAPERS NEARBY BEGAN BREAKING THE MEMPHIS DOWNTOWN SKYLINE. USE OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER AS A COMMERCIAL HIGHWAY GAINED NEW IMPORTANCE DURING THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY WITH THE INTRODUCTION OF BARGES WHICH COULD FLOAT BULK FREIGHT AT VERY LOW COST. COTTON CONTINUED TO MOVE UP FROM THE DELTA TO THE DEALERS AND RIVERFRONT WAREHOUSES WHICH PEOPLE IN TOWN CALLED THE "COTTON ROW" AREA. AND THE BLUESMEN AND WOMEN FROM THE DELTA, ALONG WITH THE COTTON, CONTINUED MOVING NORTHWARD TO MEMPHIS. BY THE LATE 1940S, THE SOUND OF BLUES HAD GROWN HIGHLY SOPHISTICATED. MEN LIKE B.B. KING AND BOBBY BLUE" BLAND -- WHOM YOU ARE LISTENING TO IN THE BACKGROUND -- WERE AMONG THE TALENTED NEW MUSICIANS TO MAKE THEIR APPEARANCE IN MEMPHIS.

KING GREW UP AMONG A FAMILY OF SEMI-PROFESSIONAL BLUES MUSICIANS. HE BEGAN HIS RECORDING CAREER IN THE EARLY 1950S WITH A BUDDING MEMPHIS OUTFIT CALLED SUN RECORDS. SCORES OF THEN-UNKNOWN ARTISTS IN MEMPHIS CUT RECORDS WITH SUN UNDER THE GUIDING HAND OF OWNER SAM PHILLIPS. IN TIME, THE ROSTER OF SUN RECORDS ARTISTS WOULD READ LIKE A MUSIC INDUSTRY HONOR ROLL, WITH NAMES INCLUDING SUCH PEOPLE AS JOHNNY CASH, ROY ORBISON, IKE TURNER, AND A YOUNG MISSISSIPPI BOY NAMED ELVIS PRESLEY.

NARR: (CONT'D) EVERY FAN OF ELVIS KNOWS THE STORY OF HOW HE CUT HIS FIRST RECORD AT THE SUN STUDIOS AS A GIFT FOR HIS MOTHER. IT WASN'T A SONG WHICH MADE THE SINGER AN OVERNIGHT SENSATION. THAT TOOK TIME. TO DEVELOP HIS GIMMICKY IMAGE AND UNIQUE SINGING STYLE, ELVIS WORKED CLOSELY WITH SAM PHILLIPS. THOSE FORMATIVE DAYS WERE RECALLED FOR VOA BY SAM PHILLIPS' SON, KNOX:

TAPE: CUT SIX -- KNOX PHILLIPS

"I THINK ELVIS FOUND SAM, OR FOUND THE STUDIO, SIMPLY BECAUSE HE WAS A POOR PERSON. HE COULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN TO NASHVILLE, BECAUSE HE DIDN'T HAVE THE MONEY. HE COULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN TO CHICAGO, OR ANY OTHER CENTER THAT MIGHT HAVE HAD A STUDIO. SAM HAD THE ONLY RECORDING FACILITY THAT THESE POOR PEOPLE COULD BE HEARD IN. SO THEY GRAVITATED TO HIM. AND SO, IN ESSENCE, ELVIS FOUND SAM, BUT SAM WAS LOOKING FOR WHAT ELVIS HAD, IN A WAY, AND SAM HAD IN MIND A PLAN TO DEVELOP THAT."

TAPE: CUT SEVEN -- MUSIC: "HOUND DOG," BY ELVIS PRESLEY. ESTABLISH BRIEFLY, THEN FADE AND LOSE UNDER NARRATOR, AS DESIRED. SONG RUNS 2:15

NARR: AFTER GAINING HIS INITIAL EXPOSURE ON SUN RECORDS, ELVIS WON A CONTRACT WITH THE LARGE R-C-A RECORDING FIRM. LIKE MANY OTHER MEMPHIS MUSICIANS WHO RECORDED ON SMALL LABELS, ONCE THE GENERAL PUBLIC "DISCOVERED" THEIR TALENT, MAJOR RECORD COMPANIES WOULD LURE THEM AWAY FROM THE SMALL LABELS WITH LUCRATIVE CONTRACTS. WHEN R-C-A WON ELVIS, THEY HAD TO BUY HIS RELEASE FROM THE CONTRACT HE SIGNED WITH SAM PHILLIPS. THE DEAL COST R-C-A ABOUT FORTY-THOUSAND DOLLARS -- AN IMPRESSIVE SUM DURING THE EARLY 1950S, BUT ONLY A FRACTION OF THE VALUE PRESLEY REPRESENTED TO THE RECORDING INDUSTRY. PHILLIPS AND HIS SUN RECORDS COMPANY OBVIOUSLY COULD NOT MATCH THE LARGE PROMOTION OR DISTRIBUTION NETWORK

NARR: (CONT'D) OF R-C-A. AN ARTIST LIKE ELVIS NEEDED A BIG COMPANY. KNOX PHILLIPS SAYS THAT SELLING ELVIS ACTUALLY HELPED HIS FATHER STAY IN BUSINESS:

TAPE: CUT EIGHT -- PHILLIP

"A LOT OF PEOPLE THINK, 'WELL, HE PROBABLY REGRETS SELLING ELVIS PRESLEY TO R-C-A,' THINGS LIKE THAT, BUT THAT'S JUST NOT THE CASE, BECAUSE AT THAT TIME, IT WAS THE MOST MONEY EVER PAID FOR A SINGLE ARTIST CONTRACT. AND WHAT SAM DID, ABOUT TWO WEEKS LATER, HE RELEASED A SONG CALLED 'BLUE SUEDE SHOES,' BY CARL PERKINS. AND HAD HE NOT SOLD ELVIS AND HAD THAT CAPITAL TO WORK WITH, HE COULD NOT HAVE PRESSED THE RECORDS TO GET THEM OUT THERE, AND IT WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN A HIT."

TAPE: CUT NINE -- MUSIC:"BLUE SUEDE SHOES," BY CARL PERKINS. IN-FULL FOR :18 TO ESTABLISH, THEN FADE UNDER AND LOSE AT WILL. CUT RUNS 2:17.

NARR: THROUGHOUT THE 1950S, MEMPHIS REMAINED THE AMERICAN MID-SOUTH MECCA FOR ARTISTS WHO SANG MUSIC CALLED "RHYTHM AND BLUES." AGAIN, MEMPHIS RECORDING EXECUTIVE KNOX PHILLIPS:

TAPE: CUT TEN -- PHILLIPS

"THE BACKGROUND THAT MEMPHIS HAS PROVIDED FOR THESE PEOPLE -- AND THAT IS, THEY'VE BEEN ABLE TO BE TEN MINUTES FROM THE COUNTRY, THEY'VE HEARD THE WIND BLOW, WAGON WHEELS GOING ACROSS PLOWED ROADS. THAT'S SOUNDS PRETTY CRAZY, BUT I THINK ALL THESE THINGS INFLUENCED RHYTHMS, AND THE WAY THEY PLAYED. ELVIS WAS NO DIFFERENT FROM B.B. KING, IN MY VIEW. HE WAS A DEPRIVED HUMAN BEING THAT HAD HEARD A LOT OF BLACK MUSIC, HEARD A LOT OF WHITE MUSIC. AND B.B. KING WAS THE SAME WAY. HE WAS JUST A DEPRIVED PERSON LOOKING FOR EXPRESSION, AND THAT'S WHAT MEMPHIS DOES. IT ALLOWS FRUSTRATED, CREATIVE PEOPLE AN OPPORTUNITY TO BE HEARD."

NARR: SAM PHILLIPS STOPPED RELEASING RECORDS IN THE MID-1960S, BUT HIS STUDIO REMAINS AMONG THE DOZEN OR SO STILL ACTIVE IN MEMPHIS. THEY'RE NOT AS BUSY TODAY AS THEY WERE A FEW DECADES AGO, BUT THEY DO GET A HEALTHY SHARE OF THE RECORDING BUSINESS. MEMPHIS STUDIOS OFFER ARTISTS A RELAXED ATMOSPHERE

NARR: (CONT'D) FOR RECORDING. UNLIKE NASHVILLE, LOS ANGELES OR NEW YORK WHERE COSTLY SESSIONS LAST PERHAPS AN HOUR OR TWO, MEMPHIS SESSIONS ARE LESS EXPENSIVE, AND CAN EASILY LAST ALL DAY. MEMPHIS ANTHROPOLOGIST AND BLUES SINGER, SID SELVIDGE, EXPLAINS WHY:

TAPE: CUT ELEVEN -- SELVIDGE

"HERE, A LOT OF TIMES, YOU'LL PUT A PERSON IN THE STUDIO WHO CAN'T DO IT THE FIRST TIME -- THEY KIND OF HAVE TO WARM UP, OR SOMETHING -- BUT IF YOU SIT THERE AND WAIT LONG ENOUGH, THE PERSON WILL GET RELAXED ENOUGH, AND HE'LL HIT WHAT HE'S SUPPOSED TO HIT. AND SINCE IT'S A LOT MORE NAIVE, IN MANY CASES YOU GET A FRESHER SOUND."

TAPE: CUT TWELVE -- MUSIC: "TIRED OF BEING ALONE," BY AL GREEN. WALKUP TIME TO VOCAL -- :09. ESTABLISH AND LOSE AS DESIRED. SONG RUNS :20.

NARR: THE MUSIC OF AL GREEN -- A POPULAR RHYTHM AND BLUES SINGER WHO STILL RECORDS IN MEMPHIS (BEAT).

OF COURSE THERE'S MUCH MORE TO MEMPHIS THAN JUST ITS MUSIC. AS WE MENTIONED EARLIER, IT'S A MARKETING CENTER FOR COTTON ... BUT IT'S ALSO A MAJOR LUMBER MARKET AND A MANUFACTURING CENTER FOR DRUGS AND CHEMICALS. SEVERAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES ARE LOCATED IN MEMPHIS, INCLUDING THE MEDICAL SCHOOLS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE. THEY'VE WORKED CLOSELY SINCE THE EARLY 1960S WITH A NOW-FAMOUS MEMPHIS INSTITUTION KNOWN AS THE SAINT JUDE CHILDREN'S RESEARCH HOSPITAL -- THE WORLD'S ONLY RESEARCH INSTITUTION DEVOTED SOLELY TO THE STUDY AND CARE OF CATASTROPHIC CHILDHOOD DISEASES. HOSPITAL SPOKESMAN PAUL PARHAM SAYS THEIR WORK HAS HELPED CHILDREN AROUND THE WORLD:

TAPE: CUT THIRTEEN -- PARHAM

OPT

"THE IMPACT AND THE EFFECTS OF THE RESEARCH BEING DONE AT ST. JUDE CHILDREN'S RESEARCH HOSPITAL HAS EXTENDED ALL OVER THE WORLD. OUR PATIENTS ARE NOT NECESSARILY FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD, ALTHOUGH WE HAVE HAD PATIENTS FROM, I BELIEVE, 35 STATES AND EIGHT FOREIGN COUNTRIES, HAVE TAKEN PART IN OUR RESEARCH PROGRAMS HERE -- THEY'VE BEEN TREATED HERE. BUT THE KNOWLEDGE IN ACUTE LYMPHOBLASTIC LEUKEMIA, IN HODGKIN'S DISEASE, IN WILMS'S TUMOR, THAT HAS COME OUT OF THIS HOSPITAL IN MEMPHIS HAS BEEN DISSEMINATED THROUGH MEDICAL TEXTBOOKS, THROUGH SEMINARS, THROUGH PROFESSIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCES TO DOCTORS AND SCIENTISTS ALL OVER THE WORLD."

NARR: MIRRORED BY THE WINDOWS OF ST. JUDE HOSPITAL ARE THE NEARBY SKYSCRAPERS OF DOWNTOWN MEMPHIS. THE WINDOWS REFLECT SEVERAL GENERATIONS OF ARCHITECTURE -- A REFLECTION OF THE OPTIMISM PEOPLE OF MEMPHIS HAVE HAD FOR THEIR DOWNTOWN AREA. BUT IT WASN'T VERY LONG AGO WHEN ALMOST ALL HOPE HAD FADED FOR REVIVING WHAT WAS A DYING AREA. SPARKED BY THE ASSASSINATION IN 1968 OF NOBEL PRIZE-WINNING CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER, DOCTOR MARTIN LUTHER KING, JUNIOR, RACIAL TENSION IN MEMPHIS GREW TO A HIGH PITCH. AS A CONSEQUENCE, MANY DOWNTOWN BUSINESSES, FEARFUL OF VIOLENCE, FLED TO THE SUBURBS, OFTEN WITH RECKLESS ABANDON. BUT RACIAL TENSION GRADUALLY EASED AND PEOPLE OF MEMPHIS BEGAN TO SALVAGE AND REBUILD THEIR DOWNTOWN. THE ONCE-DECAYING WAREHOUSE DISTRICT ON THE RIVERBANK IS CURRENTLY ENJOYING NEW LIFE AS A CONVERTED APARTMENT COMMUNITY, COMPLETE WITH SHOPS AND RESTAURANTS. CITY PLANNERS HOPE IT WILL ATTRACT MOSTLY YOUNG, MIDDLE CLASS PEOPLE, SAYS DEVELOPMENT SPOKESMAN JOHN STEVENS:

OPT

TAPE: FOURTEEN -- STEVENS

"OBVIOUSLY, LARGE FAMILIES WITH LOTS OF YOUNG CHILDREN ARE NOT GOING TO LIVE IN THE DOWNTOWN AREA, I DON'T THINK, SO WE'RE PROBABLY LOOKING AT YOUNG SINGLES AND NEWLY MARRIED COUPLES, WHO WILL LIVE AND WORK IN THE DOWNTOWN

TAPE: AREA. AND ALSO PERHAPS SOME OLDER COUPLES WHOSE FAMILIES (CONT'D) HAVE GROUND UP AND LEFT HOME."

NARR: THE PLAN TO MAKE DOWNTOWN MEMPHIS A BORN-AGAIN CITY GOES BEYOND CONVERTING WAREHOUSES INTO APARTMENTS. FOR EXAMPLE, AN ORNATE THEATRE AND OPERA HOUSE, BUILT IN THE 1920S, HAS BEEN RESCUED FROM PLANNED DEMOLITION. ITS MASSIVE ROCCOCCO ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES ARE UNDERGOING RESTORATION, AND SOON THE THEATRE WILL BECOME A KEY PERFORMING ARTS CENTER.

THE MAIN STREET OF THE DOWNTOWN BUSINESS DISTRICT HAS BEEN TURNED INTO A PEDESTRIAN MALL, IN AN EFFORT TO RELIEVE SOME OF THE DOWNTOWN CONGESTION OF TRAFFIC, AND MAKE SHOPPING MORE ATTRACTIVE. THE IDEA SEEMS TO HAVE WORKED. STORES WHICH WERE DESERTED SHELLS ONLY A FEW YEARS AGO ARE NOW ACTIVELY BACK IN BUSINESS. NEW RESTAURANTS AND ENTERTAINMENT FACILITIES ARE OPENING, TOO. AND THE OLD STOREFRONT FACADES, COVERED DURING THE 1950S WITH A GARRISH CRAZY-QUILT DISPLAY OF ALUMINUM SIGNS AND NEON LIGHTS, MAY SOON BE RESTORED TO THEIR ORIGINAL CHARM. MARKETING MANAGER FOR THE DOWNTOWN MALL IS CAROL COLLETTA:

TAPE: CUT FIFTEEN -- COLLETTA

"SUBURBAN SHOPPING MALLS HAVE A CONFORMITY OF ARCHITECTURE. DOWNTOWN SHOULD BE WHAT IT IS. IN FACT, IT IS A HODGE-PODGE (STRANGE MIXTURE) OF BUILDINGS. WHAT I RESENT IS THAT, AGAIN, IN THE 1950S, EVERYONE CAME IN AND TRIED TO MAKE THESE BUILDINGS SOMETHING THAT THEY WEREN'T. WHAT WE'RE NOW SEEKING MONEY FOR, AND I THINK WE'RE VERY CLOSE TO GETTING IT, IS MONEY TO RESTORE THE FACADES -- THE ORIGINAL FACADES -- TO TAKE OFF WHAT WAS PUT THERE, AND TO CLEAN UP, AND FIX UP, WHAT CAN BE VERY, VERY NICE EXTERIORS, AND WHAT IS UNIQUE."

NARR: TO COMPLIMENT THE REDEVELOPMENT AND REPOPULATION OF DOWNTOWN MEMPHIS, A MUDDY SPIT OF LAND GROWING OUT OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER'S WATERS, IS UNDERGOING TRANSFORMATION INTO A CREATIVE NEW CITY PARK. THE TWENTY-HECTARE TRACT, LOCATED ONLY FOOTSTEPS FROM THE HEART OF DOWNTOWN, HAD BEEN DEDICATED AS THE FUTURE SITE OF THE MEMPHIS "VOLUNTEER PARK." -- A PLACE WHERE CITY RESIDENTS CAN RELAX AND ENJOY THEMSELVES AND A PLACE WHERE EVERYONE CAN LEARN SOME FASCINATING THINGS ABOUT THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER AND ITS HISTORY. A MUSEUM ON THE ISLAND WILL TELL VISITORS ABOUT THE RIVER'S NATURAL HISTORY, ITS FOLKLORE AND MUSIC. CITY OFFICIALS HOPE TO OPEN THE PARK IN 1981. THE MAN WHO CONCEIVED THE IDEA AND DESIGNED THE NEW PARK IS MEMPHIS ARCHITECT ROY HARROVER:

TAPE: CUT SIXTEEN -- HARROVER

"THE PARK WAS REALLY CONCEIVED AS A LARGE PLACE FOR DOWNTOWN DWELLERS TO RECREATE. HOWEVER, THERE ARE VERY FEW DOWNTOWN DWELLERS IN MEMPHIS RIGHT NOW -- I'D SAY 300-400 PEOPLE MAYBE, ONLY, LIVE IN THE DOWNTOWN AREA. SO IT WAS OUR HOPE, AND OUR CONCEPT, TO MAKE OF THIS PARK AN AREA UNIQUE IN ITS DEDICATION TO THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER, TO TELLING THE STORY OF IT, BEING ABLE TO SEE IT IN DIFFERENT WAYS, TO GO DOWN TO IT, TO BOAT ON IT WITH PLEASURE, EXCURSION OR PRIVATE BOATS."

NARR: MEMPHIS IS AN AMERICAN CITY WITH EXCITING DREAMS. GEOGRAPHICALLY, ITS SITE AND SITUATION IS IDEAL FOR GROWTH. AND WITH AMERICA'S AS YET UNABATED MIGRATION SOUTHWARD TO THE SO-CALLED "SUN BELT," MEMPHIS UNDOUBTEDLY STANDS TO BENEFIT. THE DOWNTOWN -- THE CITY'S HEART -- IS COMING ALIVE ONCE AGAIN IN THE AGELESS PROCESS OF URBAN RENEWAL. BUT SCARS REMAIN. A SHORT TRIP FROM THE DOWNTOWN BACK TO THE LEGENDARY BEALE STREET UNDERSCORES HOW DEEPLY BLIGHTED

NARR (CONT'D): PARTS OF DOWNTOWN MEMPHIS HAVE BECOME. BLUES HISTORIAN HARRY GODWIN DESCRIBES THE CONDITION OF THIS AMERICAN MUSICAL SHRINE:

TAPE: CUT SEVENTEEN -- GODWIN

"BEALE STREET, ITSELF, HAS VERY LITTLE ON IT. IT WOULD BE A DISAPPOINTMENT TO YOU. THERE'S NOT A GREAT DEAL THERE. IT IS SIMPLY A SHAMBLES OF BROKEN-DOWN, CLOSED-UP BUILDINGS NOW."

NARR: FOR YEARS, MANY PEOPLE OF MEMPHIS HAVE IGNORED THE IMPORTANCE OF THEIR CITY AS AN AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER. RECOGNITION HAS COME MOSTLY FROM THE OUTSIDE. THRONGS OF TOURISTS CONVERGE ON MEMPHIS EVERY DAY TO VISIT "GRACELAND"-- THE HOME OF THE LATE ROCK MUSIC GOD, ELVIS PRESLEY. BUT TO NATIVE MEMPHIANS, GRACELAND IS LITTLE MORE THAN A FLASHY SITE AMONG A CHAIN OF GASOLINE STATIONS, FAST-FOOD RESTAURANTS AND SHOPPING CENTERS. BEALE STREET FARED EVEN WORSE. IT ONCE RANKED HIGH AMONG CANDIDATES FOR THE WRECKING BALL ... BUT NOT ANYMORE. IT'S GAINING A NEW LEASE ON LIFE. ONLY TIME WILL TELL IF IT EVER REMATCHES ITS LUSTFUL EARLY DAYS.

WE BEGAN OUR STORY OF MEMPHIS ON BEALE STREET ... AND IT IS ALSO WHERE WE END IT. THE MUSICAL HERITAGE OF MEMPHIS WAS BORN ON BEALE STREET. TODAY, ITS REBIRTH MARKS THE START OF ANOTHER ERA IN THE CITY'S HISTORY.

TAPE: CUT EIGHTEEN -- MUSIC: "BEALE STREET BLUES," BY W.C. HANDY. IN-FULL FOR :10 TO ESTABLISH, THEN FADE UNDER ANNOUNCER FOR:

ANNCR: YOU'VE BEEN LISTENING TO A PORTRAIT OF AN AMERICAN CITY: MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE -- BIRTHPLACE OF THE BLUES. THIS PROGRAM WAS WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY PAUL FRANCUCH. YOUR NARRATOR WAS ----------. THIS IS ----------SPEAKING.

TAPE: BRING UP MUSIC TO USE AS FILL. CUT RUNS 2:32.

TAPE: CUT 19 -- MUSIC: "MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE," BY CHUCK BERRY (UNCUT).

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RK/PY